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FM KABUL

TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TELNO 143

OF 270445Z MARCH 88

INFO PRIORITY ISLAMABAD, MOSCOW, WASHINGTON, UKMIS NEW YORK

INFO PRIORITY UKMIS GENEVA, PARIS, BONN, ROME, RIYADH, NEW DELHI

YRTELNO 258: AFGHANISTAN: THE BRITISH INTEREST

1. PARA 9 OF TUR INVITED VIEWS ON WHERE THE BRITISH INTEREST LIES AT THIS STAGE OF THE GENEVA NEGOTIATIONS.

2. MY VIEW IS THAT OUR ADVICE TO THE PAKISTANIS SHOULD BE THAT THEY SHOULD AGREE IN PRINCIPLE TO SIGN THE ACCORDS ONLY IF THERE IS A CLEAR AND BINDING AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE US AND THE SOVIET UNION ON SYMMETRY, AND IF THERE ARE PUBLIC ASSURANCES FROM THE SOVIET SIDE THAT A MEANINGFUL DIALOGUE WILL TAKE PLACE ON TRUE POWER SHARING BEFORE FULL SIGNATURE ON, SAY, 15 MAY.

3. SIGNATURE AT GENEVA WITHOUT AN UNDERTAKING FROM THE SOVIET SIDE TO CUT OFF MILITARY AID TO THE KABUL REGIME WILL RESULT IN A CIVIL WAR THAT THE REGIME MIGHT WIN. IT MIGHT HAND TO THE SOVIETS THE VICTORY THAT THEY HAVE FAILED TO ACHIEVE MILITARILY. ALTHOUGH THE SOVIETS HAVE ATTEMPTED TO MAKE LIGHT OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR MILITARY SUPPLIES TO KABUL, I BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE OF PRACTICAL AND VERY SIGNIFICANT PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE TO THE REGIME. THE SOVIETS' RELUCTANCE UP TO NOW TO BUDGE ON SYMMETRY IS A CLEAR SIGN THAT THEY BELIEVE THAT THE REGIME HAS A FUTURE AND THAT THEY NEED IT TO SURVIVE, AT LEAST FOR A REASONABLE PERIOD, FOR DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL REASONS.

4. EVEN IF THE GENEVA ACCORDS ARE SIGNED WITH SUPER POWER AGREEMENT ON SYMMETRY AND WORTHWHILE ASSURANCES ON INTERNAL POLITICAL CONCESSIONS, IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW CIVIL WAR CAN BE AVOIDED. BUT AT LEAST AN AGREEMENT ON THESE TERMS PROVIDES THE BEST ATTAINABLE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE EARLY WITHDRAWAL OF SOVIET TROOPS AND THE EARLY REPLACEMENT OF THE REGIME. THE SOVIETS HAVE PREPARED THE REGIME FOR WELL OVER A YEAR FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF TROOPS, BUT THEY HAVE NOT PREPARED THEM FOR A CUT-OFF OF MILITARY SUPPLIES, OR FOR THE NEED TO GIVE AWAY REAL POWER. IF THESE TWO CONDITIONS CAN BE EXTRACTED FROM THE SOVIETS THEN THE EFFECT ON THE REGIME IS LIKELY TO BE DRAMATIC

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AND ITS FALL AS QUICK AS SOME US ANALYSTS BELIEVE. HOWEVER, IF MY ANALYSIS IS CORRECT, THE SOVIETS ARE UNLIKELY TO GIVE WAY ON SYMMETRY (AS IS APPARENTLY THE CASE JUDGING FROM THE SHULTZ/SHEVERDNADZE TALKS LAST WEEK). THIS RAISES THE POSSIBILITY OF THE GENEVA TALKS FAILING AND NOT BEING RESUMED AND OF THE SOVIETS WITHDRAWING ANYWAY (AS THEY HAVE DECLARED THEY WILL), BUT IN A WAY THAT WILL PROBABLY NOT (NOT) BE IN OUR INTERESTS.

5. BUT OUR FEAR OF THIS SITUATION SHOULD NOT PRESSURE US INTO SUPPORTING PAKISTAN/US IN SIGNING A BAD AGREEMENT. IF THE SOVIETS WILL NOT CONCEDE ON SYMMETRY THEN WE SHOULD BE PREPARED TO ACCEPT THAT 1988 WILL NOT BE THE YEAR OF SOVIET WITHDRAWAL AND REDOUBLE, WITH OUR ALLIES, ALL ASPECTS OF OUR POLICY TOWARD THE SOVIET OCCUPATION THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED THUS FAR TO THWARTING SOVIET POLICY. TACTICALLY, IT WOULD PROBABLY BE IN OUR INTERESTS TO KEEP THE GENEVA TALKS GOING TO ALLOW THE SOVIETS TIME TO RECONSIDER AND FIND A WAY TO STEP DOWN ON SYMMETRY. THERE IS NO GOOD REASON WHY THE CURRENT ROUND OF TALKS NEEDS TO BE THE FINAL ONE, WHICH WE HAVE UP TO NOW ALLOWED THE SOVIETS AND CORDOVEZ TO MAINTAIN. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF THE SOVIETS ARE PREPARED TO CONCEDE ON MILITARY AID TO THE REGIME (UNLIKELY THOUGH THIS SEEMS) WE SHOULD MAKE PLAIN TO THEM OUR DESIRE TO AID THEM IN THEIR WITHDRAWAL ARRANGEMENTS AND TO WORK WITH THEM IN ESTABLISHING A STABLE, INDEPENDENT AND VIABLE (BOTH POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY) GOVERNMENT IN KABUL.

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